

Transcript

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11**NARRATOR:** Saigon. April 29, 1975.

Two years after a cease-fire agreement promised peace in Vietnam; ten years after America sent combat troops into its longest war; twenty years after an international conference divided Vietnam; thirty years after the Communists launched their struggle for Vietnam's independence.

After a generation of battle, Hanoi's commanding general proclaimed their Great Spring Victory.

Finally, for America, it was the end of the tunnel.

PRESIDENT NIXON, January 23, 1973: *A cease-fire, internationally supervised, will begin at 7:00 pm this Saturday, January 27, Washington time. Within 60 days from this Saturday, all Americans held prisoners of war throughout Indochina will be released. There will be the fullest possible accounting for all of those who are missing in action. During the same 60-day period, all American forces will be withdrawn from South Vietnam. The people of South Vietnam have been guaranteed the right to determine their own future.*

CAPT. DO CUONG (Army of South Vietnam): We are absolutely furious about the agreement. It was an injustice -- more of a death sentence for us than a peace agreement. We had never seen anything more illogical. It called for the withdrawal of only the American forces and not the withdrawal of other foreign troops, such as the Vietnamese Communists.

NARRATOR: The South Vietnamese government greeted the Paris Accords with a defiant display of flags.

The red and yellow banners were put out as symbols of loyalty on orders of the Saigon regime which had signed the agreement under intense pressure from President Nixon.

In the countryside, a checkerboard of flags -- often within sight of one another -- marked the territory of the opposing sides.

The agreement left Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces in the zones they controlled in the South, awaiting a political compromise. The Communists welcomed the agreement as recognition of their legitimacy. They did not see themselves as aggressors -- to them, the Americans had been the aggressors.

COL. BUI TIN (Army of North Vietnam): We always trained our soldiers to love their country, and to hate aggressors. We were not invading any country, and we were determined to prevent any country from invading us and trampling on the land of our ancestors.

NARRATOR: Both sides knew the struggle was not over. Two huge armies, one equipped by America, the other by the Soviet Union, stood poised head-to-head over a battered and exhausted land.

NARRATOR: At Arlington National Cemetery on February 5, Lt. Col. William Nolde was buried. On the list of Americans killed in Vietnam, he was number 57,597.

MINISTER (Funeral of Col. William Nolde, Arlington National Cemetery): *May they receive strength at your promises of eternal life. Finally, may we continue to serve unselfishly for the ideals of freedom and peace, for which he sacrificed his life.*

NARRATOR: Whatever their views of the war, most Americans now believed that the cost had been too great, and the greatest cost had been American lives. They believed that no more Americans should die for Vietnam.

A few days later, the American prisoners of war began to come home from Hanoi. They were the center of a month-long celebration, their homecoming played and replayed on national television. The last American fighting men were out of Vietnam.

But America was still committed to South Vietnam. At San Clemente in

April, President Nixon publicly restated his support for South Vietnam's President Thieu.

PRESIDENT NIXON, April 1973: *Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen. As our joint communique indicates, President Thieu and I have had very constructive talks with regard to how we shall work together in the years ahead -- working for the program of peace which we now hope will all be the wave of the future, not only for the Republic of Vietnam, but for all the countries in Indochina. Mr. President, we have been allies in a long and difficult war. And now you can be sure that we stand with you as we continue to work together to build a lasting peace.*

NARRATOR: Nixon also renewed a secret pledge to Thieu: he would "respond with full force" if the Communists broke the cease-fire. Thieu expected American air power to save him. But Nixon's own power was under attack in Washington.

SENATOR ERVIN, Watergate Hearings, 1973: *We are beginning these hearings today in an atmosphere of utmost gravity. The questions that have been raised in the wake of the June 17 break-in strike at the very undergirding of our democracy. The first phase of the committee's investigation will probe the planning and execution of the wire-tapping and break-in of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters at the Watergate complex.*

NARRATOR: Watergate was undermining the Nixon presidency. Televised hearings revealed the depth of the scandal, linking it in a complex tangle to Vietnam, and to Nixon's covert actions against the anti-war movement.

JOHN DEAN (former White House Aide), Watergate hearings, 1973: *The White House was continually seeking intelligence information about demonstration leaders and their supporters that would either discredit them personally or indicate that the demonstration was in fact sponsored by some foreign enemy. We never found a scintilla of viable evidence indicating that these demonstrators were part of a master plan.*

JOHN EHRLICHMAN (former White House aide), Watergate hearings, 1973: *Some of these events in 1969 and 1970 included intensive harassment of political candidates and violent street demonstrations which endangered life and property. Taken as isolated incidents, these events were serious. Taken as a part of an apparent campaign to force upon the President a foreign policy favorable to the North Vietnamese and their allies, these demonstrations were more than just garden variety exercises of the First Amendment.*

JOHN DEAN: *I believe that most anyone who worked at the White House during the past four years can attest to the concern that prevailed regarding leaks, any and all leaks. That concern too a quantum leap when The New York Times began publishing the Pentagon Papers in June of 1971.*

PRESIDENT NIXON, Speech to Former POWs, May 24, 1973: *Had we not had secrecy, had we not had secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese, had we not had secret negotiations prior to the Soviet summit, had we not had secret negotiations over a period of time with the Chinese leaders, let me say quite bluntly there would have been no China initiative, there would have been no limitations of arms for the Soviet Union and no summit. And had we not had that kind of security and that kind of secrecy that allowed for the kind of exchange that is essential, you men would still be in Hanoi, rather than Washington today. And let me say I think it is time in this country to quit making national heroes out of those who steal secrets and publish them in the newspapers.*

HENRY KISSINGER (National Security Adviser): After June 1973 I did not believe that the cease-fire would hold. Watergate was in full swing. We had already acquired intelligence documents in which the North Vietnamese had made the very correct analysis that Nixon would not be in a position to repeat what he had done in 1972, because of his domestic difficulties. The Congressional agitation to end all military activities in Southeast Asia was already in full force, and every day a new amendment was being proposed. So it was just a question of time until one of them would pass, and Le Duc Tho would read them to me.

NARRATOR: Nixon and Kissinger were convinced that only the threat of

American intervention would deter the Communists from rapidly taking over the South.

In June 1973, as the Watergate scandal continued to weaken Nixon, Kissinger initiated a new round of talks with Le Duc Tho, the chief Communist negotiator. The two put their signatures on a renewed cease-fire agreement.

But with the prestige of his presidency waning, Nixon lacked the power to stand firm in Vietnam, even though the anti-war demonstrators had dwindled to a dedicated few.

DEMONSTRATORS, ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATION, Washington, D.C., August, 1973: *We shall live in peace...*

We shall live in peace someday...

NARRATOR: He had ended the draft and brought the troops home. Despite the continued bombing of Cambodia, to most Americans the war was finished.

Nixon's opposition now centered in Congress, which moved to limit his actions in Southeast Asia.

SEN. HUBERT HUMPHREY, June 1973: The Cambodia bombing is illegal. I think it violates the President's powers under the Constitution. It is ineffective and it is immoral. And yet the President stubbornly pursues it -- ignoring the will of the Congress as expressed in votes and ignoring the will of the American people as measured by every public opinion sampling.

NARRATOR: On August 15, 1973, American bombers completed their final wartime mission over Indochina. The bombing cutoff was the first decisive step Congress had taken to end the war. The South Vietnamese army, resupplied with American weapons, held its own through the rest of 1973. But some of Thieu's officers were worried that they would lose their momentum without the Americans.

GEN. PHAN PHUNG TIEN (South Vietnamese Air Force): When we expressed our concerns to President Thieu, he replied that he agreed with us. But he explained that the Americans had no choice -- they had to keep their armed forces out of the Vietnam quagmire. But he promised that the Americans would punish any Communist violations -- and we believed him.

NARRATOR: Late in 1973, President Thieu announced the start of the "Third Indochina War," launching an air and ground offensive against the Communists. Thieu saw no alternative to war. He was convinced that the political compromise called for in the agreement would lead to a Communist takeover.

He was determined to fight on, believing that America still stood behind him. The new U.S. ambassador, Graham Martin, encouraged Thieu's confidence in America. Some members of Martin's staff disagreed.

FRANK SNEPP (CIA analyst): There was Martin, encouraging Thieu to believe that aid would -- that the cornucopia would be there always; that there would be continuing aid from the United States, even, again B-52s. And he encouraged Thieu to accept this, and as I've said before, Thieu believed it with such conviction that he decided not to retrench, not to pull back until it was so -- much too late.

NARRATOR: In Washington, Congress was now on the offensive.

REP. PETER RODINO, July 24, 1974: *We have reached a moment when we are ready to debate resolutions whether or not the committee on the Judiciary should recommend that the House of Representatives adopt articles calling for the impeachment of Richard M. Nixon...*

COMMITTEE VOTES:

Mr. Danielson AYE

Mr. Drinan AYE

Mr. Rangle AYE

Miss Jordan AYE

Mr. Smith NO

Mr. Sandman NO

Mr. Railsback AYE

Mr. Rodino AYE

PRESIDENT NIXON, August 1974: *To fight through the months ahead for my personal vindication would almost totally absorb the time and attention of both the President and the Congress. Therefore, I shall resign the presidency, effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour, in this office.*

GERALD FORD: Almost immediately after becoming president in August of 1974, I wrote the heads of state of all of our allies, including President Thieu of Vietnam. It was a general letter, but I specifically indicated that I as president, would carry out the policy of my predecessors involving South Vietnam.

BUI DIEM (Ambassador at Large): Mr. Thieu brought the letter written by President Ford then, and he read the letter to the whole cabinet meeting in Saigon, and it was quite a strong effect on all those people over there and they thought that, well, even if Mr. Nixon resigned, they can still believe on a commitment from the U.S. to help South Vietnam.

NARRATOR: By August of 1974, the military balance had begun to shift against President Thieu.

His troops were thinly spread. They no longer had American air support. The American military advisers were gone.

Congress had reduced aid, and South Vietnam also suffered from soaring oil prices after the 1973 Middle East war.

Gasoline was tightly rationed. Ammunition was scarce. Helicopters lacked spare parts and maintenance, and troop deployment by truck was slow and cumbersome.

FRANK SNEPP: In addition, there was the problem of corruption, the siphoning off of material destined to troops in the field. The U.S. establishment in Saigon never had a very good grasp on the subject of corruption because it was, from an intelligence standpoint, strictly off-limits, something verboten.

We, of course, realized that if the South Vietnamese looked anything but pristine pure, the U.S. Congress would not vote any additional aid to Saigon.

NARRATOR: Some South Vietnamese officers and government officials grew rich by selling stolen gasoline and other supplies. Pilots sometimes demanded bribes to evacuate wounded soldiers.

COL. WILLIAM LEGRO: When the military budget was so drastically reduced, the so-called one-time use bandages and syringes for the use of medical drugs, and blood bags, and that sort of thing for transfusions, those were gone. They had to wash the bandages. I don't know what they did for blood bags. Their medical support, which had been pretty good, was getting very, very grim.

NARRATOR: More than 31,000 South Vietnamese soldiers died in 1974 - their highest number for any year except 1972.

GEN. TRAN VAN NHUT (Army of South Vietnam): The Americans instilled in the Vietnamese soldiers and officers the American way to fight a war. Then, when the Americans withdrew and the supplies reduced, it was only natural that the morale and the combat effectiveness of the troops had to change for the worse.

NARRATOR: The Americans had spent lavishly in Vietnam. At Camranh Bay they built a two billion dollar deepwater port. Now, homeless Vietnamese improvised shelters out of its deserted barracks and clubs.

Aid had been cut, and the bombing stopped, but Thieu still counted on pledges from two U.S. Presidents, and from Ambassador Martin. Like many Vietnamese, he could not believe the U.S. would abandon its enormous investment in Vietnam.

In Hanoi in October 1974, North Vietnamese leaders reached a different conclusion. General Van Tien Dung, a senior strategist, was present.

GEN. DUNG: During this meeting, we reached an important conclusion. The American imperialists had already withdrawn their troops from the southern part of Vietnam, and it would be very difficult for them to return. Therefore, no matter how much aid they gave the Saigon regime, they could not prevent the collapse of that regime.

NARRATOR (North Vietnamese Film): After 30 years of almost continuous war, the Communists' dream of a reunified Vietnam seemed within reach. This North Vietnamese film depicts the beginning of the 1975 campaign, commanded by General Dung.

More than 100,000 fresh troops moved down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, now a modern truck route. They massed in Communist-held areas in the South.

Crack units attacked the province of Phuoc Long and easily took its capital city. They were probing -- testing America's reaction.

Thieu renewed his appeal for U.S. aid.

PRES. THIEU, January 31, 1975: What we need is to have enough means not only to sustain the current situation, but as long as the Communists sustain the momentum of their offensive, I think we still need the means to defend ourselves.

NARRATOR: Backing Thieu, President Ford and Ambassador Martin affirmed that America had a moral responsibility to South Vietnam.

REP. PETE MCCLOSKEY: The Ford Administration was then trying to get Congress to vote more money for Vietnam and Cambodia, and a number of us went to Vietnam and Cambodia in late February and early March to try to appraise the situation to test against what Martin had been saying, what the reality was.

Graham Martin, the ambassador, and his station chief were incapable of giving a fair appraisal to a visiting team of Congressmen. They were so emotionally wrapped up in the desire to save South Vietnam. Martin was saying, "The Vietnamese can stand, all you got to do is give 'em more ammunition and more equipment."

NARRATOR: The delegation concluded that South Vietnam had received enough American aid. It would now have to fight alone.

At the same time, General Dung deployed three divisions encircling the city of Banmethuot, in South Vietnam's Central Highlands. He was confident that the Americans would not intervene, but he still expected that it would take two years to defeat Thieu's forces. He moved carefully.

NGO MINH KHA: In order to allow the tanks to go in, the artillery units shelled steadily for about two days so that the enemy would not be able to hear the rumbling noise of the tanks.

NARRATOR: Dung also staged several diversionary attacks around Pleiku, another highland city.

The South Vietnamese were lured into defending Pleiku, weakening Banmethuot's defenses. As they left, Dung's troops moved.

NGUYEN CONG THANH (Army of North Vietnam): Our unit reached the outskirts of Banmethuot at four o'clock on the afternoon of March 9, 1975. We made camp, rested, ate, and prepared for the next days' attack against the city. We were ordered to fight the enemy at close range -- to "cling to their belts," as we put it.

NARRATOR: Within two days, Dung's superior forces had overwhelmed Banmethuot.

GEN. PHAN PHUNG TIEN: My own air force unit transported two regiments of special forces to Pleiku in order to retake Banmethuot. But to our complete surprise, on the 14th there was an order to withdraw from Pleiku. Nobody could believe it.

NARRATOR: President Thieu made a crucial decision. He ordered his forces to abandon the northern and central provinces and form a new line of defense further south.

But, hoping to avoid panic, he did not announce the withdrawal or reveal his plans. As the rumors flew, fear spread. Nobody knew what to believe and nobody wanted to be left behind.

KENNETY MOOREFIELD (U.S. Embassy aide): During the withdrawal, the air force, obviously, was using their airplanes to get out any way they could. Mixed in with all of this, as if it wasn't complicated enough, was the panic-stricken flight of tens of thousands of civilians and dependents. In many instances the military forces up there had their own families living with them in the Kontum-Pleiku area, and that meant they had to be extremely concerned about the protection and survival of their own families at a time when they were attempting to retreat whatever their forces were remaining back to the coast.

GEN. PHAN PHUNG TIEN (South Vietnamese Air Force): Banmethuot fell, but the government said nothing. We only learned about the withdrawal from Pleiku from rumors. The administration issued no official announcements at all. Because of that silence, people stopped believing in the government.

NARRATOR: The official silence panicked the population. Within days, thousands of civilians were streaming toward the coastal city of Danang, desperately seeking safety.

The Communist leaders, surprised by the Saigon army's disintegration, now moved swiftly. They set a deadline: victory before the rainy season bogged down their troops.

Dung's forces closed in on Danang.

SERGEANT THO HANG (Army of South Vietnam): The BBC and VOA broadcasts said that Danang was about to fall, and that news further spread panic among us soldiers. Our officers had fled. We talked things over among ourselves, and then decided: Let's go home.

NARRATOR: By March 21, 100,000 refugees, many of them troops and their families, had crowded into Danang. Some soldiers put their wives and children aboard ships headed for safer areas in the South. Many failed to get out.

AMERICAN WOMAN, March 1975: *The soldiers here are confused, as you walk down the street, you see soldiers with no shoes, just staring into space. There's a -- I think "panic" is a word that describes very well what's happening in Danang. We've heard that a plane ticket now to Saigon is over 100,000 piastres if you can afford it, and of course that means that the rich leave and they take all their belongings.*

SERGEANT THO HANG: None of the civilian and military planes could land at the Danang airport because every time they approach, crowds chase them in jeeps or motorscooters trying to get on the planes to go to Saigon.

NARRATOR: A World Airways jet with company president Ed Daley aboard made a perilous landing at Danang.

Daley was flying one last rescue mission, against official American advice. He wanted to save women and children first, but desperate soldiers jammed into the airplane. They scrambled into the baggage compartment and clung to the stairway as the plane took off.

It was the last American flight out of Danang.

NARRATOR: On the 30th of March, General Dung's forces captured Danang, sweeping across the vast air base where the first U.S. ground forces had landed in 1965. For one of his military camera team, Danang was home.

THU VAN: I arrived there on the 31st, the day after liberation. Along the road I saw many corpses of Saigon troops. Their weapons and uniforms, which they had stripped off, were strewn all over the place. As we entered the city of Danang, we encountered a group of disbanded Saigon soldiers. They had been hiding in a graveyard, and they stood up to surrender to us.

When I found my family, I saw my mother for the first time in 20 years. Before we could say a single word we embraced each other and wept. During the conversations with my family I learned that all my nephews had become Saigon soldiers.

NARRATOR: Many Vietnamese families had members fighting on both sides. Now, some were reunited for the first time in decades.

Offshore, refugees from Danang were packed aboard rescue ships.

Thousands drowned trying to flee, or were suffocated in the crush. As Thieu's army crumbled, the hysteria spread south.

GEN. TRAN VAN NHUT: Confusion spread even further in the army when rumors multiplied that Vietnam would be again partitioned. Soldiers couldn't -- they couldn't understand why were being sent to central Vietnam to evacuate their families. If there was going to be another partition, why should they continue to fight? And why should they leave their families stranded out there?

NARRATOR: President Thieu, still believing that America would not abandon him, again pleaded for help. On April 2, he met with Ambassador Martin and President Ford's special envoy, General Frederick Weyand. Weyand promised to recommend more aid. But by now, the Americans were losing faith in Thieu.

Weyand reported to Kissinger and Ford at Palm Springs. They concluded that a military deadlock was their best hope. Even if only part of South Vietnam could be defended, the Communists might agree to a political deal -- with or without Thieu.

GERALD FORD: General Weyand came back and recommended 722 million dollars in additional military aid and assistance to make sure that the South Vietnamese would have adequate military hardware to create the stalemate. I was always hopeful that there could be a negotiated settlement, even at that late date in March and April of 1975.

NARRATOR: Ford again asked Congress for aid. But members of Congress suspected a maneuver to blame them for the impending disaster. They rejected his request.

REP. MILLICENT FENWICK, April 1975: *We've sent, so to speak, battleship after battleship, and bomber after bomber, and 500,000 or more men, and billions and billions of dollars. If billions and billions didn't do at a time when we had all our men there, how can \$722 million save the day?*

APRIL 11, 1975 Interviewer: *Can the South Vietnamese government, under President Thieu, or under any other leader -- whatever the South Vietnamese decide among themselves -- handle this situation?*

Ambassador Martin: Well, I think the test is that they have handled it. And I think the government can handle it in the future, can become self-sufficient, can keep their freedom, and allow us, when we end our involvement here, to withdraw, as I think we should, leaving South Vietnam economically viable, militarily capable of defending itself with its own man- power, and free to choose its own government, its own leaders, as its people themselves may freely determine. This is a goal which is easily within our reach.

FRANK SNEPP (CIA analyst): It seemed to me that there was no question that the South -- what was left of the South -- was in imminent jeopardy, and that there was no way of regaining the northern half of the country. Well, Martin wouldn't believe it, and Martin held to this optimistic view of the military situation almost to the end. And this was one of the problems in his approach to the evacuation question.

NARRATOR: Thieu imposed a curfew in Saigon. American civilians began to pack up. Out-going commercial flights were jammed, but the U.S. mission refused to disclose its evacuation plans -- either for Americans or for Vietnamese who might be special targets for the Communists.

HENRY KISSINGER (Secretary of State): We had the fear that if we evacuated too rapidly, the South Vietnamese government in its frustration might turn on us and there might be a massacre of Americans. Secondly, we wanted to withdraw at a measured pace, so that the North Vietnamese would be concerned that if they moved too fast, we might intervene in order to save the remaining Americans.

HENRY KISSINGER: We assembled a large fleet off South Vietnam for evacuation purposes. And I attempted, a rather forlorn attempt, a rather forlorn negotiation, to ease the transition by creating a coalition government in Saigon and implying that that fleet might be there for purposes other than simply evacuation. And proposed some sort of coalition effort which was not refused initially.

NARRATOR: Le Duc Tho, Kissinger's former negotiating partner, joined

General Dung in the field. They weighed their options as they braced for battle. If they could crush the Saigon regime, negotiations with the Americans would be unnecessary.

Thieu's forces prepared to confront them in Long Khanh province at Xuan Loc, on the main road to Saigon. They moved into position on April 12.

General Le Minh Dao defied the Communists.

GEN. LE MINH DAO, April 1975: *I will hold Long Khanh, I will knock them down here, even if they bring here two divisions or three divisions.*

NARRATOR: At Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport, the embassy began to evacuate Vietnamese who might be in danger.

KENNETH MOOREFIELD (U.S. Embassy aide): I arrived out at the air base, walked into the theater, there were hundreds, maybe several thousands of Vietnamese there, and at that point, of course, we'd been charged with the evacuation of American dependents, that was the only mandate that I had at the time. And there was a palpable sense of hysteria in the air.

NARRATOR: At Xuan Loc, South Vietnamese troops held their ground under relentless shell fire, finally yielding as General Dung threw three divisions against them.

On April 21, the remnants of Thieu's troops were rescued, as women and children and the wounded struggled for space on the flights out.

That same day, pressed to make way for a leader who might reach a deal with the Communists, President Thieu resigned.

His successor was the aged, half-blind vice president, Tran Van Huong.

The Communists promptly rejected Huong.

At daybreak on April 28, South Vietnamese troops faced North Vietnamese commandos at the Newport Bridge. They were at the gates of Saigon.

In Saigon and Washington, faint hopes for a political settlement persisted. Huong was replaced by Duong Van Minh, regarded as a figure the Communists might accept.

As Minh spoke, a thunderstorm erupted. The Communists had beat the rainy season to the capital. General Dung had met his deadline.

The morning of April 29, 1975.

Tan Son Nhut airport was under fire, preventing passenger planes from taking off. But Ambassador Martin was still reluctant to begin a full-scale helicopter evacuation.

COL. WILLIAM LEGRO (Defense Attache Office): North Vietnamese artillery was falling intermittently on the airfield. We no longer had any capability to use fixed-wing airplanes, that is, for the evacuation because of the artillery fire on the airstrip. I told the ambassador that we didn't have a great deal of time left; that we would probably have to leave that night. He went into my other office where I still had one secure telephone operating, and at that time he got authority to begin the evacuation from the embassy.

NARRATOR: The word went out: all Americans and Vietnamese at risk would be taken out by helicopter to U.S. aircraft carriers. Officials quickly designated departure points at the airport, the U.S. embassy, and elsewhere in the capital.

KENNETH MOOREFIELD (U.S. Embassy aide): I got together with the Marine captain that was responsible at that point for organizing the convoys of buses that were to go into the city.

MAY 1975: Q: *How are we getting to the helicopters?*

A: *Oh well, they're going to come in and pick us up from points around Tan Son Nhut.*

Q: *Around Tan Son Nhut...How much baggage, Captain?*

A: *Will you please,...one small handbag.*

KENNETH MOOREFIELD: I discovered that he did not have a very good knowledge of where some of the pickup points around the city where everyone had been told to form up. So I assisted him in getting some of

the buses together...

MARINE CAPTAIN: *Would the women over here please part? Come on, let's move it. Please stop pushing! One at a time!*

KENNETH MOOREFIELD: We spent the better part of the morning and the early afternoon running convoys back and forth from Saigon back out to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base.

The people that I described as high-risk Vietnamese were not high risk merely because they'd had a close association with us in the past, but because we believed that if they stayed behind and were captured that their lives would be in jeopardy once the North Vietnamese took over. As a consequence, these people were mortally scared.

SAIGON EVACUATION, April 1975 *Wally Henderson: While here I met my friend's widow who I've known about for some ten years.*

Q: Vietnamese friend?

Wally Henderson: Yes, yes -- we went to school together at Washington State University. I was very concerned...(starts to cry)...about reprisals to the family and so I returned to help them if I could but I couldn't get anyone out, the widow was gotten out earlier through embassy help, but not the others.

KENNETH MOOREFIELD: The embassy was completely surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of Vietnamese at the three entrances. It was impossible if you were Oriental, virtually, to get into the grounds of the embassy at that point in time.

NARRATOR: By late afternoon, most Americans and thousands of Vietnamese had reached the U.S. carriers offshore. Thousands more Vietnamese were waiting in Saigon.

Some South Vietnamese pilots ditched their aircraft in the South China Sea.

KENNETH MOOREFIELD: The feeling in the city was one of almost total chaos at this point. Anarchy, virtual anarchy was beginning to break out and in various streets that we'd attempted to go down, there were armed soldiers in half uniforms -- combined Air Force/Marine/Army types that had obviously begun the task of looting and taking advantage of the disorder and confusion that prevailed at that point in time.

GEN. PHAN PHUNG TIEN: After escaping from Vietnam and landing on the American carriers, I must admit that those of us who had been in responsible positions felt kind of ashamed, and dishonored. To me it seemed that everything that happened during the last days of South Vietnam had been arranged in advance, and there was nothing that the Vietnamese officers at the lower echelons could do to prevent the situation from coming apart.

COL. LEGRO: I felt that the United States, particularly the Congress because they were making the policy, had betrayed a trust that the United States had given South Vietnam. And since I represented the United States, I also felt that I was personally betrayed; I had also made, implied promises, that the United States would honor the agreements we had made at the time of the cease-fire and then when things got really tough we really just cut and run.

COL. BUI TIN (Army of North Vietnam): After reaching the other side of the bridge, we went straight to the Independence Palace.

NARRATOR: Communist forces entered the city from six different directions. They had planned a two-year campaign to capture the capital. It took 55 days.

NGUYEN CONG THANH (Army of North Vietnam): None of us knew how to get to the Independence Palace. So many streets led to downtown Saigon, and I myself had no idea where it was. So I turned to an old woman and asked: "Mother, where is Saigon?" And she replied, "You're in Saigon."

NARRATOR: Inside the palace, Duong Van Minh, president for 44 hours, was waiting. Colonel Bui Tin took the surrender.

COL. BUI TIN: When I saw fear on the faces of Minh and the others present, I said: "The war has ended today, and all Vietnamese are victors."

Only the American imperialists are the vanquished. If you still have any feelings for the nation and the people, consider today a happy day."

That night, when I sprawled on the lawn of the Independence Palace with members of a communication unit, we all agreed it was the happiest day of our lives because it was a day of complete victory for the nation, because the war ended.

NARRATOR: The Communists had attained their goal: they had toppled the Saigon regime. But the cost of victory was high. In the past decade alone, one Vietnamese in every ten had been a casualty of war. Nearly a million and a half killed, three million wounded. Vietnam had been a tormented land, and its ordeal was not over.

Though American equipment still stocked Saigon's markets, the Americans were gone. They counted nearly 60,000 dead and more than 300,000 wounded. It was their first defeat. The promised end of the tunnel had brought not light but a new uncertainty, new questions: what was America's role in the world? What were the lessons of Vietnam?

page created on 3.29.05